

KATRIN FISCHER. *Yakṣagāṇa. Eine Einführung in eine südindische Theatertradition Mit Übersetzung und Text von „Abhimanyu Kāḷaga“*, Drama und Theater in Südasiens 3, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004, pp. xi+202. ISSN 1431-4975, ISBN 3-447-05103-5 (Paperback)

Yakṣagāṇa, a theatre tradition from the state of Karnataka in southern India, attracted scholars' attention relatively late, the first monographs being published by K. V. Karnath (1975) and Martha Ashton Bush and Bruce Christie (1977). The volume presented is a new contribution to studies concerning this particular theatre form and Indian theatrical tradition as such. Katrin Fischer, a young German scholar, experienced the world of the Yakṣagāṇa when she did her fieldwork in Karnataka as a researcher within the theatre. Her book is published as a consecutive volume (3) of the series dedicated to *Drama and Theatre of South Asia* and edited by Professor Heidrun Brueckner from Würzburg University in Germany. The work is divided into two main parts. While the first one is dedicated to a general picture of the phenomenon of the Yakṣagāṇa, the second contains a study of a Yakṣagāṇa text (*Abhimanyu Kāḷaga*).

The concise introduction (pp. 3–5) is followed by Chapter II (pp. 5–54), presenting numerous aspects of the theatre of Yakṣagāṇa. The author starts with a brief history of the theatre, which can be traced back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though the first Yakṣagāṇa

text known to us, *Virāṭa Parva*, which was composed in 1564 (the language of this theatre is mainly Kannaḍa, but some Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tuḷu can be also found). Then various constituents of the stage presentation (only men are allowed to perform) are discussed: musical elements (orchestra, musical notations, songs, melodious recitations, dances), acting (gestures, face expressions, stage movement), costume and make up (the term *Schminkmaske* is used), and the context and structure of the performance. Two Yakṣagāna characters catch our attention, Bhāgavata and Hanumanāyaka (pp. 31–4). In them we can recognise familiar and significant figures from Classical Sanskrit theatre, Sūtradhāra and Vidūṣaka. Other important facts concerning Yakṣagāna tradition are also mentioned: aesthetics, religious and non-religious ambiance, patronage, spectators, and present-day position. Fischer concludes the first part of her book with a discussion about the formal classification of the Yakṣagāna—folk or classical? She refers to the opinions of scholars who place this theatre form either in the folk or classical tradition (pp. 49–53). We remain without any unquestionable proposal or definite answer, however. It is undoubtedly a very complicated matter in the case of Yakṣagāna, as well as many other Indian theatre forms. Should we follow the suggestion Kapila Vatsyayan made in her book (*Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams*, 1980) to call such theatrical phenomena ‘traditional’ since they refer to both classical and folk traditions and are somehow ‘in between’? Yakṣagāna is definitely placed in between these two traditions with its own blend of various elements developed over the course of time.

The second part of Fischer’s book (pp. 54–157) is dedicated to the text *Abhimanyu Kāḷaga* (*The Battle of Abhimanyu*), which was written by Dēvidāsa in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is performed by Yakṣagāna troupes. The texts used for presentation are called *prasaṅgas*. The author brings forward numerous issues regarding Yakṣagāna textual tradition and in particular the *prasaṅga* mentioned above. She gives a synopsis of the play/text, considers its metrical structure and poetic frame, and discusses its form and subject matter. After some methodological remarks in regard to the rendering process, a German translation of the *Abhimanyu Kāḷaga* is presented with numerous annotations (pp. 100–34). Then a transcription of the original text follows (pp. 135–57). Chapter VII contains some chosen stanzas from Dēvidāsa’s text and an earlier work by Kumāra Vyāsa, *Karṇāṭa Bhārata Kathāmañjari*, (written in the 15<sup>th</sup> century) to contrast both poets and their compositions (pp. 159–79). The final chapter (VIII) provides a glossary of the most important terms of the Yakṣagāna tradition; finally a bibliography and three indices are included.

Katrin Fischer’s book is a very welcome addition to studies in Yakṣagāna theatre. Since it is dedicated to the visual tradition, at least a few illustrations or photos would

have been appreciated. That the author published the text of the play (its original and its translation into German) and provided an elaborated presentation is worth praising. A Western reader has a rare, if not the first and only, occasion to become acquainted with the Yakṣagāṇa textual tradition.

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